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AUTHOR	Dukess, Laura F.
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ABSTRACT

Experience has shown that providing instructional, emotional, and managerial support to new principals by giving them experienced, expert principals as mentors can help to a large extent. Over the course of a year, New Visions for Public Schools studied six types of principal mentor programs offered to new and needy principals in six New York City community school districts and in New Vision small schools. Several different organizations, including the districts, universities, and the supervisors' union, made current and former principals available as mentors. The most striking and important differences concern the confidentiality of the relationship, the selection of the mentors, the selection of topics, and the support and preparation for the mentors. Through a review of scholarly and practitioner-based research, as well as in-depth interviews with 9 principal mentors, 14 mentees, and 6 superintendents or deputy superintendents supervising the mentor programs, New Visions was able to draw conclusions and make recommendations concerning effective principal mentor programs. Mentor principals must have sound records of success. They need very strong interpersonal skills; they should be reflective and compassionate, good listeners, and effective communicators who can speak the truth. (DFR)

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MEETING THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL MENTOR PROGRAMS:

THE EXPERIENCES OF SIX NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

By

Laura F. Dukess
NEW VISIONS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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NEW VISIONS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS is the largest education reform organization dedicated to improving the quality of education children receive in New York City's public schools. Working with the public and private sectors, New Visions develops programs and policies to energize teaching and learning and to raise the level of student achievement. The organization plays many roles: broker, convener, facilitator, incubator, advocate for policy change and resource provider. The goal of New Visions is to ensure that all students have access to effective schools that enable them to fully realize their potential and become productive citizens.

MEETING THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE: DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL MENTOR PROGRAMS is one of a series of Occasional Papers based on the work of the Superintendent Leadership Networks. New Visions is grateful for the generosity of The Clark Foundation, The Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc., Vivendi Universal, and the Board of Education of the City of New York, all of which support the Superintendent Leadership Networks.

MEETING THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL MENTOR PROGRAMS:
THE EXPERIENCES OF SIX NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In New York City and throughout the nation, school principals face a daunting task. Every day they are called upon to exercise instructional, financial, community and individual leadership, and every day they are held accountable for the academic, social and emotional success of children. Clearly, principals need a myriad of supports to meet these responsibilities. One of the most promising avenues for providing instructional, emotional and managerial support to new principals is by giving them experienced, expert principals as mentors.

Over the course of a year, New Visions for Public Schools studied six types of principal mentor programs offered to new and needy principals in six New York City community school districts and in New Visions small schools. While the programs share a common aim—to provide principals with needed support through one-on-one relationships with experienced, expert principals—there are many differences. Several different organizations—including the districts, universities, and the supervisors' union—made current and former principals available as mentors. The most striking and important differences concern the confidentiality of the relationship, the selection of the mentors, the selection of topics, and support and preparation for the mentors. Through a review of scholarly and practitioner-based research, as well as in-depth interviews with nine principal mentors, 14 mentees, and six superintendents or deputy superintendents supervising the mentor programs, New Visions is able to draw conclusions and make the following recommendations concerning effective principal mentor programs.

First, mentor principals must have sound records of success. Except where specific circumstances require other skills, mentors should be expert instructional leaders with an intimate knowledge of current curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Mentors need very strong inter-personal skills: they should be reflective and compassionate, good listeners and communicators who can speak the truth. Mentor principals should be carefully matched with their mentees in order to best serve the mentees' needs, and mentors currently leading schools must be strong enough that their own schools will not suffer as a result of the principal's additional responsibilities. These current school leaders

should not have more than two mentees; full-time mentors no longer leading their own schools should have no more than six mentees. All mentors should make a point of bringing their mentees to observe successful schools, and they should be given clear guidelines about the parameters and expectations of the program, including the areas of work, confidentiality, accountability and minimum time commitments (these should differ depending on whether the mentors are leading their own schools, but at a minimum should include telephone calls once every two weeks and four school visits).

Directors of mentor programs should ensure that mentors have an understanding of context, including the district's priorities, learning philosophies, curricula and assessment, and information about the achievement data, demographics, and community of the mentee's school. They must also provide regular opportunities for the professional development and support of the mentors. Finally, they should provide compensation to the mentors for the enormous amount of time and energy they are expected to devote to their mentees.

INTRODUCTION

New York City, like school districts across the country, is experiencing a crisis in leadership. While the job of principal is becoming more difficult—successful principals are required to be instructional leaders, building managers, chief financial officers, disciplinarians, and more—with every passing year, fewer qualified applicants are seeking positions as principals.[1] Even when applicants are highly qualified, successfully negotiating the difficult job of principal requires extensive and ongoing support. One of the ways some districts are attempting to provide that support is through formal principal mentor programs. In these districts, superintendents hope to be able to provide every new principal with a mentor who is a skilled, experienced principal available for guidance, assistance, and both emotional and professional support.

From its derivation in Greek mythology through its use in large corporations and schools today, mentoring has always encompassed an experienced practitioner making her practice public by teaching, supporting, and serving as a role model for someone with less experience or less expertise. While mentoring relationships have long been common in the arts, sciences, literature, business and education,[2] more recently they have been formalized and structured as part of required support or professional development for corporate employees and educators—teachers and principals alike.[3] Six New York City community school districts and the New York City Local Education Fund, New Visions for Public Schools, are among the districts and organizations providing support to new principals and principals in need of improvement by pairing them with mentors. This study examined these mentor programs from the perspectives of the dis-

tricts' superintendents and the experiences of 14 principals provided with mentors and nine principal mentors.

After describing the purposes, characteristics and activities of the mentor programs as well as the experiences related by the participating principals, it becomes clear that mentoring is a welcome addition to the professional development and support we can provide to principals. Careful analysis of the interviews and the literature permits us to elicit descriptions of successful mentors and mentor programs. These are then used as a basis for offering a concrete set of design principles for high quality principal mentor programs.

BACKGROUND: THE SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP NETWORKS

For the past four years, New Visions for Public Schools has facilitated and documented the work of several groups of New York City Community School District superintendents. In small networks of six to eight members, the superintendents voluntarily come together to work and learn from each other as they focus on improving instruction throughout their districts. In addition to providing individual support to participating superintendents, New Visions for Public Schools facilitates, documents, supports, and disseminates the most effective practices learned from the group and draws out policy implications and makes policy recommendations from the work of the superintendents.

The six districts whose mentor programs are the subject of this study were members of the first Superintendent Leadership Network. The districts included in the study are extremely diverse: They range in size from 6,000 to over 42,000 students, and in achievement from the lowest to the highest performing schools in New York City. The superintendents in the Network began their work together on leadership development several years ago. In the context of their discussions several of the superintendents mentioned their principal mentor programs. During the course of these discussions several different mentor programs were described, some more successful than others. The superintendents expressed an interest in determining what made some programs more successful than others and how they could most effectively structure their principal mentor programs. These Leadership Network meeting discussions, the superintendents' interest in improving their mentor programs and individual interviews with those six participating superintendents whose districts had principal mentor programs at the time provided the impetus and initial background research for this study of the principal mentor programs.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study focused on the principal mentor programs in six New York City Community School Districts: Community School Districts 2, 3, 10, 15, 17 and 19. Principals were selected for inclusion in the study based upon recommendations from Superintendents or Deputy Superintendents. These supervisors were all specifically asked to include principals who enjoyed positive mentor experiences as well as those whose experiences were not successful. In addition, principal mentors from New Visions for Public Schools that mentor and provide support for principals in the network of New Visions small schools were included in the study. A total of 23 principals were interviewed; nine mentors and 14 mentees. In only a few instances were principals and their mentors both interviewed for the study.[4]

A series of structured interviews were conducted with six superintendents and deputy superintendents designing and/or supervising the mentor programs, as well as with the 23 principal mentors and principals being mentored. In addition, a review of scholarly and practitioner-based research informs the study.

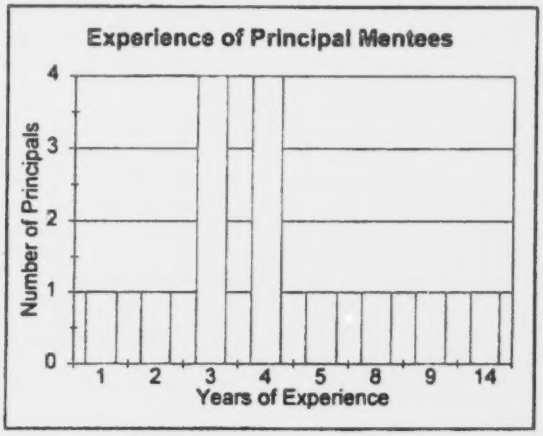
The Mentor Programs. The six districts whose mentors and mentees were interviewed for this study provided mentors through five different kinds of mentor programs. Two districts provided intra-district mentoring with current and former school leaders. Two districts provided inter-district mentoring with current school leaders. Two districts provided university-based mentors with former school leaders. Two districts' principals were supported by former school leaders through the supervisors' union. And two districts provided former school leaders as mentors, either as district employees or consultants.

Principal Mentors. The principal mentors had between six and 25 years of experience as school leaders, with an average tenure of 12.3 years. Four principals were working as principals in their own buildings at the time they were mentoring others; the remaining five were no longer building principals at the time they were mentoring others. Of those principals no longer leading their own schools, one was hired through a university, two were employed by their former district and two provided services through New Visions for Public Schools. Of the four working principals serving as mentors, two mentored principals in their district and outside of their district and two only mentored principals outside of their district.

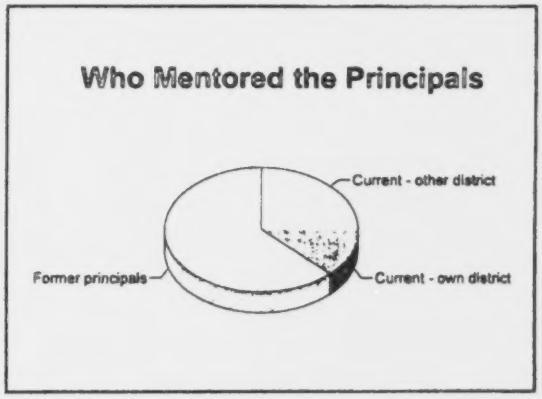
Principal Mentees. The principals being mentored had between one and 14 years of experience as school leaders, with most having between two and four years. All of them were building leaders at the time they were mentored. The 14 principals described 16

mentor relationships: two were mentor relationships with principals working in their own districts; four were mentor relationships with principals working in other districts; and ten were mentor relationships with former principals.

Four of the principals were mentored by former principals from their own district and six by former principals from other districts. Of these, two were mentored by principals employed directly by their district, six by principals provided to the district through a university, and two by principals who provided services through the supervisors' union.



CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL MENTORS



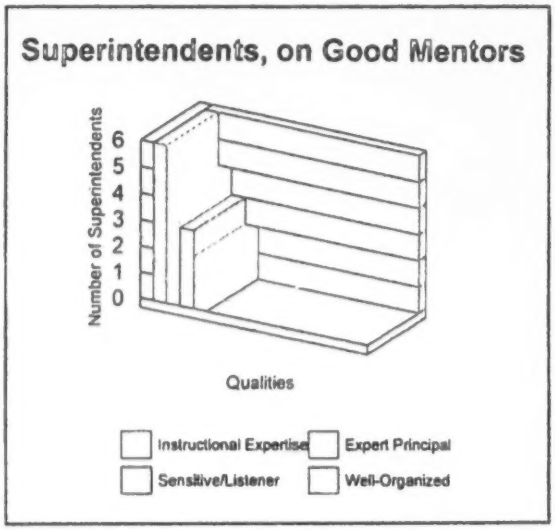
Particularly for the new principal, the job of leading and managing a school is overwhelming, and in order to survive and succeed, new school leaders need significant support.[5] In order for an individual mentor to be a helpful and effective source of support, she must possess skills and knowledge to help the new principal become an instructional leader, carefully use highly-tuned interpersonal skills to effectively share the skills and knowledge, be resourceful so that she is seen as helpful to the principal and be well-organized in order to get the job done.

Scholars have described the first few years of being principal as a developmental process, with phases of anticipation, survival, disillusionment, isolation, overload, rejuvenation, and reflection.[6] Mentor program directors, mentors and mentees in New York City cite the ability of mentors to help support principals through all of these phases, while helping them to develop crucial leadership knowledge and skills, as reasons for having mentors assigned to new principals. A review of scholarly research reveals that there are many different definitions of mentoring. Most share the basic elements of a trusted advisor assisting a junior or less experienced colleague, by providing knowledge, skills and emotional support through coaching, example, listening, and dialogue.

Though in the educational context, mentoring has more often been associated with teachers than principals, its use with principals is growing and is often based on successful experience with teacher mentor programs. Thus, it is helpful to look at and learn from the literature that describes successful teacher mentors and mentor programs.[7]

This section discusses the characteristics that the New York City principals and superintendents believe are shared by good mentors. While no mentor is expected to have all of the qualities described, a successful mentor will have several of them. The mentor program director should provide professional development to support the mentors to acquire others, especially those that seem particularly important in the context of the individual mentoring relationship.

Principal Mentors Must Have Expertise. All of the principals and supervisors interviewed agreed that the mentor must bring relevant expertise to her mentee. With respect to the area of expertise, superintendents were unambiguous: mentors need instructional expertise and a record of success. While they vastly preferred that all of their mentors have a real expertise in instructional leadership—and here they specified that mentors need to have current knowledge about curriculum and instruction—they also recognized that there are other important qualities for a successful mentor. After instructional expertise, superintendents tended to look for successful experience as a principal, sensitivity and communication skills—both listening and communicating effectively—and being well-organized. In addition, superintendents recognize that some principals need mentors to help them with administration, parental relationships, conflict resolution, etc. In those cases mentors had to have expertise in the specific needed area as well.



Mentor principals must have a sound record of success. Except in specific instances where other skills are called for, mentors should be expert instructional leaders with solid knowledge about current learning theories, curriculum, assessment and school organization.

A mentor with a proven track record as an expert instructional leader can help a new principal to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to becoming an instructional leader. The instructional mentor

reviews school performance data, walks the school with the principal, observes teachers, meets with the specialists and helps the new principal to lead the school community. As described by one superintendent, the mentor not only brings her "observational power" to the school, but she also "knows how the principal can begin to take hold of the school" and focus on specific instructional improvements.

The mentor may begin by planning or modeling staff development, or perhaps—as several mentors did—helping the principal to analyze performance data and target a specific grade for improvement. As described below, there are myriad ways the successful mentor goes about offering her assistance and countless areas where her instructional expertise can be brought to the service of the mentee and the mentee's school.

> Matching principals with their mentors should be done purposefully and carefully. Mentors should be expert instructional leaders whose strengths serve the mentees' needs and who have successful experience with schools similar to the mentees.

Though most mentors and mentees agreed that a good mentor has to have deep and up-to-date knowledge of curriculum and instruction, many were less wed to the belief that a successful mentor necessarily has to be an expert instructional leader. Principals more often described the expertise needed by a mentor as that which is relevant and helpful to the mentee. Most mentors and mentees pointed to the need for mentors to have expertise and experience with similar school levels and sizes, similar students, similar issues, etc. Indeed, one former principal suggested that a first year principal could successfully be mentored by a second or third year principal who is able to help the brand new principal through that all-important first year, even if the mentor is not yet a real instructional leader.

> When using active principals as mentors, care must be taken to select only those whose schools are sufficiently strong that they will not suffer as a result of the principal being a mentor and spending time and energy working with another school leader.

Whatever the particular area of expertise brought by the mentor, the superintendent must be comfortable that the mentor is a strong enough principal that she can safely devote time and attention to another principal and school. There were instances reported by superintendents where they selected mentors who were not yet ready to mentor and whose schools suffered as a result. There was also one mentor who reported that she believed that her mentoring may have been responsible, in part, for the decline in student achievement—at least as measured by test scores—at her school.

Mentors Must Have Strong Personal and Interpersonal Skills. Like the qualities of mentors found throughout the professional literature,[8] in their descriptions of good

mentors and good mentor relationships the New York City principals almost all began with honesty and trust. According to one mentor, without trust, honesty and confidentiality, "all else is immaterial." Virtually every principal interviewed spoke about the importance of trust, both in the abstract and in the reality of their relationships.

> When selecting mentors, superintendents should seek to appoint leaders with a strong instructional knowledge base who are reflective, compassionate, good listeners, good communicators, and able to speak the hard truth.

Assuming the mentor is knowledgeable about instruction, trustworthy and capable of maintaining confidentiality, for the mentoring relationship to be successful in developing the leadership capabilities of the mentee, the mentor must be able to listen, support the mentee, and communicate the "hard stuff" that drives improvement. This will not likely occur if the mentor does not have specific knowledge as well as very strong "people skills." These important skills and other attributes have been described as including:

BEING A GOOD LISTENER: Good mentors must be able to hear the concerns, stated and unstated, as well as the hesitancy that might be communicated by the mentees.

BEING A CONTINUAL LEARNER: Good mentors are able to learn from and reflect on their work as mentors and on the mentoring relationship.

BEING REFLECTIVE: Good mentors reflect on the mentees' issues and how best to solve the mentees' problems rather than just offering advice based on their own experiences.

BEING FLEXIBLE: Good mentors must be willing to follow the lead and need of the mentee, even if it means temporarily abandoning the planned activity in order to help the mentee through a need of pressing urgency.

BEING UNSELFISH: Good mentors recognize that they cannot take too much time from the mentees' day and work, and are respectful of the need for mentees to sometimes do things on their own.

BEING COGNIZANT OF THE LIMITATIONS OF THE POSITION: Good mentors can be demanding but they must not overstep their authority, undermine the mentees' authority or enter into the realm of supervision.

BEING A FACILITATOR OF CHANGE: Good mentors don't insist that the mentee demand change; they help the mentee to learn when and how to create change.

BEING PROACTIVE: Good mentors call with suggestions—for example, strategies to prepare for a City-wide test or to tell their mentees to expect a particular memorandum or request and how to handle it—rather than always waiting for the mentee to call with a question.

BEING ACCOUNTABLE: Good mentors take their work seriously; they understand that the mentees depend on them and that they have the ability to help the mentees be successful if they work hard at the relationship.

BEING WILLING TO BE AVAILABLE: Good mentors, whether they have scheduled time with their mentee or are called on the spur of the moment, are available to the mentees night and day. Indeed, good mentors welcome being called and always make the mentees feel that their calls are welcome.

BEING POSITIVE: Good mentors look for the positive and help principals feel and be successful.

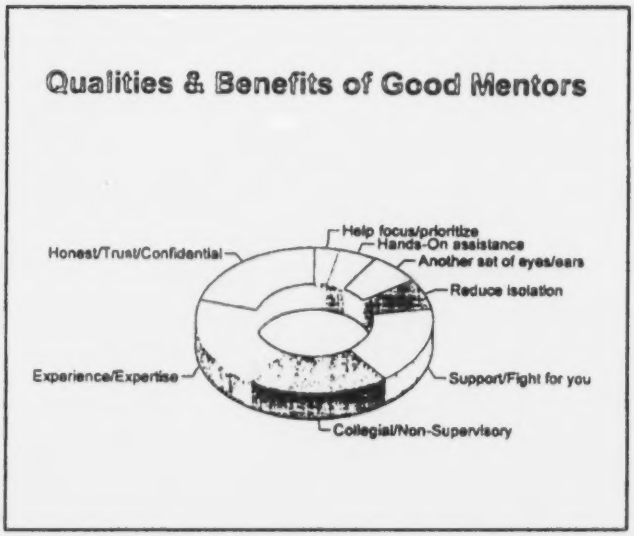
Mentors are Resourceful. One of the most appreciated attributes of successful mentors is their resourcefulness. Mentees expressed extreme gratitude when they could describe their mentors as those who were always ready with a suggestion—if they did not know or have something, good mentors know where to get it or get it themselves. While there is certain information that an experienced principal can provide regardless of where her experience lies—such as how to respond to a union grievance, where to refer a family with substance abuse problems, suggestions for curricula, or test preparation materials, etc.—there is other information that can only be provided by a principal whose experience is in the same district as the mentee's.

Mentors Must Be Organized and Set Goals. Both superintendents and mentors recognized the importance of mentors being organized and specific about setting goals. A successful mentoring relationship will not happen haphazardly, leaders say; if mentors do not plan and set measurable goals it is not likely the work will be done well.

HOW HAVING A MENTOR BENEFITS NEW PRINCIPALS

There are many benefits to having a mentor and many reasons why superintendents want to provide their newest principals in particular with individual mentors. While most mentor program directors spoke first about the mentors' ability to help new and struggling principals become instructional leaders, most of those new principals pointed to more immediate benefits of having a mentor. Among the greatest benefits to having a mentor, according to many principals, is that it lessens the isolation of being prin-

cipal. Several mentees noted that it is a lonely job at the top and the mentor helps principals to learn that they are not alone in their fears, frustrations and emotions. Mentors and mentees also spoke about the importance of knowing that there is someone to call with every little question. Indeed, it can be the mentor's ability to help a new principal understand and master the administrative details of running a school that allows the principal to begin to focus on becoming an instructional leader. Helping the new principal get started is extremely important and virtually all of the New York City new principals, mentors and mentor program directors cite the mentor's assistance here as critical. The emotional, administrative and instructional support provided by mentors to their partner principals was credited by those with the most successful relationships as largely responsible for getting new principals through the first years of leading a school.



Thus, it is the sharing of the experience and expertise of the mentor principal in all matters that pertain to leading a school that is described as the reason for having mentors. Superintendents and deputy superintendents reported that one of the reasons for having mentors is to recognize the new principals' need for this expertise. Even with the many professional supports provided by these superintendents and districts to principals, they understand that there is still a need for individualized assistance, available at all hours of the day and night. They understand that principals need to visit models of successful schools, programs and teaching in order to begin to craft a vision for their own schools. They understand that new principals need to have someone available to provide emotional support as well as skills and knowledge. And they understand the value in having a powerful and successful role model for their newest principals.

HOW BEING A MENTOR BENEFITS THE WORKING PRINCIPAL

Mentoring also provides many benefits to those mentors who are current school leaders. In addition to the recognition of success attendant to being designated a mentor, both mentors and mentor program directors testify to the improvement in practice in one's

own school that accompanies serving as a mentor for another principal. In every interview with a superintendent, deputy superintendent and principal that mentored while leading a school, this important and often overlooked value was confirmed.

For the most part, the mentors and superintendents spoke of similar benefits, first among them the fact that serving as a mentor led the principals to be more reflective and critical of their own practices. One principal described being a mentor while leading a school as like walking around "holding a mirror in front of your face" and always making sure your school is "ready for company." Mentors felt that they must be able to explain their practice and make the reasons for their success explicit. They felt tremendous pressure to ensure that their schools and teachers were particularly good models for the issues being discussed or worked on with their mentees. Often, the mentors were not content to leave their schools as they then existed. When helping a principal improve how she worked with difficult staff members, one mentor principal thought carefully about how she worked with her own difficult staff members and determined that she could make her own improvements. Another mentor reported that having to articulate how she worked with teacher-leaders helped her to see that she could improve her own work with teacher-leaders, and she put certain changes into practice before bringing the mentee principal to visit her school. Perhaps this aspect of mentoring was best described by the principal who said "being a mentor forces you to walk your talk."

> Mentors should be compensated for the enormous amount of time and energy they are expected to spend with and on behalf of their mentees.

Mentors and mentor program directors expressed the unanimous belief that being designated as a mentor is a public recognition of success and, where principals leave their schools to devote themselves to mentoring other principals, it can be a much welcomed promotion or step on the career ladder. Because those who mentor in these districts were also provided with stipends in recognition of the extraordinary time and effort necessary to being a good mentor, becoming a mentor also confers financial benefit upon these distinguished educators. In addition to honoring the success of those principals designated as mentors, superintendents pointed to the fact that having a way to promote successful long-time principals helped to keep these excellent principals from leaving their jobs or the district.

Both superintendents and mentors also reported that mentoring stretched the mentors' thinking about teaching and learning, in particular about adult learning. While mentors had experience providing staff development, several mentioned that this was the first experience where they were concentrating as much on the process of effectively communicating with and teaching adults as they were the substance of the information they

were trying to convey. Providing new, substantive challenges for these experienced principals was viewed as a benefit by both mentors and superintendents alike.

Although some mentors were no longer leading their own schools, they too reported growing personally and professionally though the mentoring process. As discussed earlier, successful mentors are also learners. Thus, it is not surprising that another way current and former principals benefit from mentoring is by virtue of their spending time with other principals and being exposed to other schools and educators. Principal mentors described this as an important benefit of the position—both for themselves and for their mentees. "Because I learn so much from seeing and working with other principals," one mentor of several principals said, "I can take from one and bring to another. I pollinate." Finally, several former principals spoke about how gratifying it is to help others. As expressed by one former principal, helping someone else is the "greatest feeling in the world."

WHAT DO MENTORS DO AND HOW DO THEY DO IT?

Instructional Support
Administrative Support
Emotional Support

The New York City mentors, like those described in the literature, provide knowledge, skills and emotional support to their mentees. The knowledge and skills include both the instructional and administrative or managerial aspects of running a school, and the emotional support covers a wide range of personal and professional issues that a principal may confront. Just as the needs addressed are wide-ranging, so too are the ways in which they are addressed. This section provides many examples and descriptions of the kinds of activities mentors engaged in with their mentees and the ways in which they provided support.

Good Mentors Provide Instructional Support. Except in specific and isolated instances, such as where a mentor was provided to assist a principal with administrative or managerial aspects of running a school, all of the superintendents and deputy superintendents interviewed pointed to the importance of selecting as mentors only those principals and former principals who possess current knowledge about curriculum and instruction and who are or were instructional leaders in their school. Without this instructional expertise, superintendents believe that the mentors would not be able to do the kinds of things successful New York City mentors did to help their mentees develop as instructional leaders.

These activities include engaging in dialogue about, modeling, planning and accompanying the mentee to learn how to walk through the school and observe teachers mean-

ingfully; helping the principal structure her time so that she can get into classrooms more frequently; attending, coaching and critiquing teacher observations as well as pre- and post-observation conferences; providing models for and critiquing letters to the file; planning and modeling professional development; modeling staff conferences; analyzing performance data and school staff expertise in order to help develop school-wide plans for the at-risk learners; planning, showing models and setting up classroom libraries; and making recommendations for professional development for the principal and staff.

Other aspects of instructional leadership supported by mentors include helping to choose curriculum and test preparation materials, making recommendations for books and supplies, engaging in dialogue and evaluating teachers in order to select appropriate placements for teachers, helping to plan, structure and introduce extended day and Saturday programs, and discussing and critiquing the supervision of instructional specialists.

Almost every mentor made a point of bringing the mentee to her own school (or, if the mentor was not currently a principal, to another's school) to provide a model of as many successful practices as possible, with a particular emphasis on visits structured to study the instructional area under discussion. Because successful mentors learn the strengths and weaknesses of the mentees' schools, they were often able to pair some of their most expert teachers with teachers from the mentees' schools who could benefit from their own mentoring experience. Mentors arranged for teachers to visit each other and frequently encouraged the teachers to develop their own mentoring relationships with the teachers in the mentee principals' schools.

> Mentors who are currently leading their own schools should be willing to open up their schools and faculty members to the mentee. Mentors who are no longer leading their own schools should be given access to successful schools in order to arrange relevant school visits for mentees and their faculty members.

Good Mentors Provide Administrative and Managerial Support. Mentor and mentee principals frequently commented that unless a school is managed well, all the instructional expertise in the world will not make it a successful school. Thus, particularly in the case of new principals, another important role for mentors is to provide assistance in the administrative or managerial aspects of running a school. In addition to the specific tasks that mentors help mentees to perform, mentors recognized that an important skill to impart is learning to distinguish among issues that require immediate attention, issues that require a lot of attention, issues that can wait and issues that can be handled with a minimum amount of time and effort. Similarly, in the face of new principals being

bombarded with new and continuing issues every day, the mentors can help them to prioritize and maintain their focus. The same strategies of providing models, providing resources, engaging in dialogue, and working together were used by mentors as they tackled this area of responsibility.

Some of the important administrative and managerial items with respect to which mentors provided support included preparing to open the school, scheduling, programming, writing memoranda to the staff, structuring arrival, dismissal, and lunch, writing up transcripts, and preparing, modifying and working with the budget. In addition, principals reported that they invited their mentors to School Leadership Team meetings, provided model pacing calendars and school rules and regulations, reviewed assignments for paraprofessionals, helped analyze and worked with teachers to create better bulletin boards, and helped set up and organize School-Based Options Committee in order to help the school select appropriate teachers.

Good Mentors Provide Emotional Support. The third area of assistance provided by mentors, as reflected in the literature and by the New York City principals, is emotional support. Given the immense pressure, the many areas of responsibility, the competition, and the loneliness of the job, the importance of this area is paramount. Having a mentor is "like therapy"—there's someone to listen, "a shoulder to cry on," someone to talk to, and someone "who's there to make you feel like you can face another day of doing this job." Specific instances described where mentors provided emotional support include being with a principal when he first learned and then had to inform the staff that the school had been designated a SURR school;[9] sitting with a principal as she gives an unsatisfactory observation report to a teacher; structuring, attending and deconstructing difficult meetings with parents; helping a principal through a crisis involving a student or teacher; and preparing for the superintendent's walk-through and sitting through the pre- and post-walk-through conferences. The importance of emotional support cannot be overstated; it is undoubtedly one of the reasons that every principal mentor, mentee and program director recognized the need for the mentor/mentee relationship to "click."

QUANTIFYING THE MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS: FREQUENCY OF TELEPHONE AND PERSONAL INTERACTIONS

In order to understand what it takes to be a successful mentor, it is important to know just how much time mentors devote to their mentees. While most of the time reported on reflected personal visits or telephone calls, many mentors and mentees also spoke about sitting and working together at district-wide professional development programs as an important aspect of the mentoring relationship. Not surprisingly, the amount and

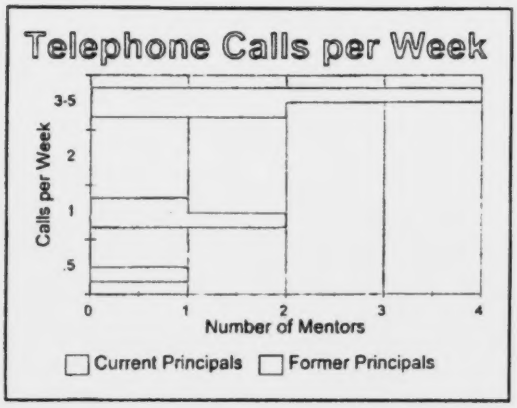
nature of the time devoted to each mentee varied tremendously between those mentors who were also currently leading their own schools and those who no longer carried that responsibility.

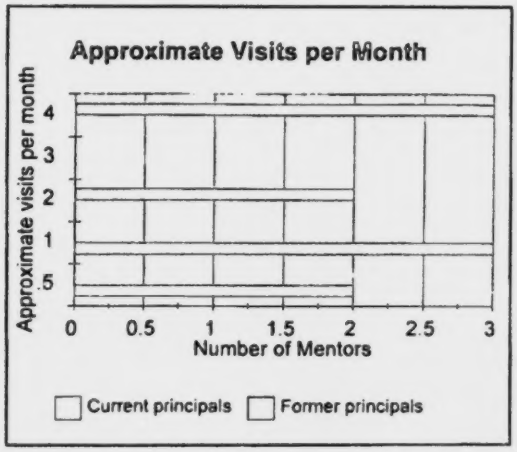
> Mentors and mentees should be given guidelines about the parameters of the program, including minimum time commitments (these should differ depending on whether the mentors are leading their own schools, but at a minimum include telephone calls once every two weeks and four school visits).

The time difference is so great that the mentoring experience is quite different depending on whether the mentor is or is not also leading her own school. Nonetheless, so long as the mentee felt the mentor was available to her when needed, and there was telephone contact at least twice each month and at least four school visits, there was no less satisfaction with the mentoring experience expressed by those principals whose mentors were also school leaders.

Though there was no specified minimum amount of time that mentors and mentees need to have together, mentors and mentees agree that mentors need to have the time to spend with their mentees, be willing to make themselves available at times when needed, and be respectful of the mentees' time constraints. Related to the concern about time and availability of the mentor is geography and the fact there being a great distance between mentor and mentee can cramp an otherwise healthy mentoring relationship. While some principals paired together who were physically located great distances from each other remained in close telephone contact and arranged several meetings for themselves and staff members at both schools, other principals reported that just knowing that it would be difficult for them to get together limited the kinds of accomplishments they believed would otherwise have been possible.

Mentors Leading Their Own Schools. Mentors who were also leading their own schools had the large majority of their contacts with their mentees over the telephone and, in some instances, by e-mail. Except when the relationships were considered unsuccessful, these mentors all reported frequent phone and/or e-mail contact. The calls ranged from daily or several times per week (the frequency reported by two mentors), to one per week (reported by two mentors) or about once every two weeks (reported by one mentor). By contrast, the visits between these mentors and their mentees were of far less frequency. The mentors leading their own schools were mentoring either one or two principals at a time, and all described great difficulty arranging sufficient time to visit with their mentees. Indeed, most said they would have liked a greater number of visits, but were simply unable to arrange for them. Three of these mentors reported "several" visits with their mentees, a number that usually encompassed between four and eight visits—including both visits to and from the mentor, and two reported only "a few" visits, usually defined as three or fewer. All of the visits were at least for a half day; many





were full day visits. In every case, the mentor and mentee visited both schools, and in a few cases arrangements were also made for the mentee to visit other schools, both with and without the mentor. Most of these mentors acknowledged that they were not able to schedule as many visits as they thought the relationship warranted. Perhaps as a result, several of these working principals spoke about making a point to invite their mentees to attend and then sit, study and work with their mentees at district-based professional development opportunities. Several also arranged a few meetings and school visits for all of their mentees together.

Mentors No Longer Leading Their Own Schools. Whether mentoring was a full- or part-time job, mentors no longer leading their own schools spent a great deal of time with their partner principals. Four of the five former principals interviewed reported that they were on the phone with their partner principals at least three times per week, if not daily. The fifth former principal, who was responsible for mentoring several new principals, described phone calls as occurring on an as-needed basis. Sometimes this would be daily, but other times it might be as infrequently as once every two weeks.

Visits to the schools of the mentee principals were also quite frequent. Three mentors described visits as occurring once a week, or in one case, at least once a week. The other two mentors described visiting their mentees a bit less frequently, ranging from once a week to once a month. Several mentees whose mentors were retired or former principals estimated that their mentors visited them approximately once every three weeks. Since these mentors were no longer leading their own schools, most made arrangements for their mentees to visit other successful

Mentors who are currently leading their own schools should mentor no more than two principals at a time. Mentors who are no longer leading their own schools should, depending on other commitments, mentor no more than six principals at one time.

schools, picking and choosing schools that best illustrated the particular practice the pair was trying to develop in the mentee's school. A few of these mentors also held several meetings per year where they would invite and meet with all of the principals for whom they served as mentors.

HALLMARKS OF SUCCESSFUL MENTOR PROGRAMS

The very fact that principals with mentors in many different programs enjoyed successful relationships with their mentors confirms that there are different ways to structure a successful mentor program. Indeed, there are different ways to define success and the interviews revealed that success means different things to different people. At a minimum, a successful mentor relationship includes a match of mentor and mentee where the two share an understanding about the important purpose and potential to be realized from the relationship—where the mentee feels the mentor is available to her and supporting her with relevant and expert advice, and the mentor feels appreciated and effective. Though no definition of success was provided to the mentors and mentees, their own analyses reveal several common threads. In this section, these elements are discussed in terms of how the mentor relationships are structured and the contexts in which the structures exist. The particular hallmark structures that define the relationships are honesty and trust, appreciation, confidentiality and participation.

Mentor Relationships are Honest and Trusting. The importance of a mentor relationship being honest and trusting cannot be overstated. As new principals begin tackling the daunting tasks of leading a school, they report there being tremendous value in receiving honest feedback from someone whom they trust has their best interest at heart. "Changing a school culture is really difficult," a principal said, and it's particularly hard if the previous principal was well-liked by the teachers and parents of the school. "Unless I know deep in my heart" that the mentor's recommendations "are going to be in my best interest," she said, I'm going to be "less likely to insist on some of the hard stuff." Another principal, who described a series of conversations with her mentor that finally convinced her that her positive assessment of a well-loved teacher was not correct and the teacher should be moved, described the mentor as giving "tough love" and expressed the belief that it was hard to hear, but both welcome and necessary.

This notion of trust encompasses both emotional support and expertise of needed skills and knowledge. Several mentees described part of the benefit of having a mentor as the principal having someone to check her practice against. They explained that mentees must trust that the feedback they get from the mentor is honest, in their best interest and based on real expertise. Mentoring relationships were not successful where the mentors

did not possess the expertise needed by the mentee principals, a potential pitfall and a reality acknowledged by mentors and mentees alike.

Finally, a trusting relationship is one in which the mentee does not feel any competition with the mentor, and thus can trust that the mentor will always act in her best interest. However, according to several principals, there may be competition where mentors currently working as principals in the district mentor other principals currently working in the district. One mentor described there being competition where she and her mentee were both interviewing and recruiting the same staff members and students. Another described being uncomfortable with the idea that his school's performance data would be looked at against his mentor's school. If the mentee senses that the relationship puts her in competition with the mentor, she loses the belief that the mentor necessarily has her best interest at heart at all times.

Mentor Relationships are Welcomed. Successful relationships are possible only when the mentee appreciates the need for the mentor's assistance and the mentor wants to see the mentee succeed. Some mentees, particularly those who are not just beginning their careers as principals, view their being assigned a mentor as unnecessary or an indication of failure. In such circumstances, they may not be open to the support and assistance the mentor can provide. One mentor described her mentee as being annoyed that she was being supported by a mentor, stating that what she really needed was an Assistant Principal. In this case, the mentor helped overcome the skepticism by confirming that while she was not an Assistant Principal, she would support the principal's efforts to get an Assistant Principal for the school.

At least three mentors reported the need to stick with a mentee even if, at the beginning of the relationship, the personalities do not click or the mentor is made to feel unwelcome. One mentor described repeated visits to the school, where the mentee refused to meet with her. Eventually, the mentor began meeting with other specialists in the school and, as a result, observed that the central office was not doing a good job supporting the instructional needs of the school. She then began working with the school secretaries. When the principal saw the effectiveness and unselfishness of the mentor's work, she invited her to a cabinet meeting and the two began to develop a collaborative relationship. "You must always be looking for openings," one mentor said—places where you can make yourself useful and valuable. In most cases, the relationships that began so uncomfortably were able to blossom. In rare instances, however, where the mentee's actions made clear that she did not want a mentor—such as the mentee who neither returned nor initiated phone calls, failed to follow through on the mentor's suggestions and chose not to attend professional development opportunities offered by the mentor—after a few months the mentors "cut [their] losses" and gave up on the relationship.

Mentor Relationships are Confidential and Non-Supervisory. Confidentiality is one of the most important characteristics of a successful mentoring relationship. While superintendents can and often do serve some of the same roles as mentors, their relationships with principals are also always supervisory. Mentor principals understand and most mentees openly state that unless they believe their relationship is confidential and that matters discussed with the mentor will not be shared with the superintendent or other supervisor without prior notice, if at all, they cannot possibly have the open, honest, and trusting relationship envisioned and hoped for. As discussed below, the need for confidentiality is complicated when mentors and mentees are both working in the same district and mentor principals feel or are specifically given responsibility to communicate information concerning the mentee to their superintendent.

Mentor Relationships are Participatory. Successful mentor relationships are those in which, to the extent possible, the mentor participates in the mentee's work—whether by writing or providing models of memoranda to the staff, reviewing the curriculum under consideration, taking and distributing minutes of cabinet meetings, designing or providing forms to monitor lateness or absence, or slogging line-by-line through the budget. One mentor, who expressed the need to be participatory by noting that "you've got to give to get," described how, after discussing issues with the principal, she would summarize their discussion and conclusion in a memorandum ready for the principal's signature. The mentor viewed this as modeling, enhancing time management and making sure she did not demand too much of the principal's time. "The job," she said is "to embellish the strengths [the mentees] have and give them some keys to unlock the challenges." Sometimes the mentor can "just give them the key" and sometimes, according to this mentor, "you have to actually help them open the door."

Mentors with their own schools to lead were more likely to consider their job as providing advice and support—and, occasionally, "first aid"—rather than participating in the mentees' school leadership. Of course, mentors explained that different levels of participation are necessary with different mentees and that some responsibilities are more easily shared than others. Nonetheless, those mentors that felt strongly about the need to participate rather than advise believed that it was always best to try to involve themselves in the efforts they made to help their mentees.

DIFFERENCES AMONG THE MENTOR PROGRAMS

Confidentiality, the Selection of Mentors and Districts, the Selection of Topics, Support and Preparation for Principal Mentors

The mentor relationships described in this paper, while similar in many respects, derive from five different programs—intra-district mentoring with current and former school leaders, inter-district mentoring with current school leaders, university-provided mentors with former school leaders, supervisors' union-provided mentors with former school leaders, and district-employed consultant former school leaders. While the aim in all of the programs is the same—to provide a new or needy principal with needed support in a one-on-one relationship with an experienced principal—there are a few important differences among the programs. The most important differences concern the confidentiality of the relationship, the selection of mentors, the selection of topics of the principals' work, and the kinds of support provided to the mentors.

Confidentiality of the Mentor/Mentee Relationship. As discussed above, almost every mentor and virtually all of the mentees insisted that for the relationship to be productive, it has to be confidential. If mentees are going to open up to their mentors and allow them to see and understand where they really need support, they need to trust that the information will not be relayed to their supervisors (who are their rating officers). While the university and supervisors' union programs insisted that this confidentiality be respected, where the districts were providing mentors from their own staff or consultants, the superintendents feel strongly that they be permitted to speak with the mentor about the mentoring experience and the progress being made by the mentee principals. This preference on the part of superintendents is so strong that several superintendents reported that they would choose not to use a mentor program where they are not permitted to speak with the mentors about their experiences with the mentees. Within this study, two superintendents reported having stopped using one program where they were not permitted to speak with the mentors and a third superintendent stayed with the program after successfully negotiating permission to meet regularly with the mentors and involve them in district leadership development initiatives.

Even in those district-sponsored programs where superintendents meet and speak with the mentors, however, both superintendents and most mentors understand the necessity of trust and confidentiality. As one superintendent explained, the "mentors all understand that this [is] not about tattling and 'getting' people, it [is] about improving leaders." Mentors approached the topic a little differently: most explained that gaining their mentees' trust was so important that they would not ever report on confidential conver-

sations and they would not give the superintendent any information about the mentee's experience without first obtaining the mentee's permission. Just as mentors and mentees acknowledged that it would not be prudent for a new principal to call the district office with questions or what seem like crises on a daily basis, mentees expressed the importance of knowing that their discussions and experiences with their mentors would not in any way be equivalent to making those calls. While some mentors who were in frequent contact with their district leaders about matters including their mentoring experience stated that the mentor relationships would be easier if they were permitted to accord their mentees complete confidentiality, others did not find their responsibilities to the district leaders disconcerting.

The Selection of Mentors and Districts. One of the greatest differences between those programs designed by districts and those programs where mentors are provided by the union or through universities lies in the superintendent's ability to select and match the mentors with principal mentees. Some of the mentor programs provide mentors to principals without giving the superintendents an opportunity to make an appropriate match. In these programs, far more than others, both mentees and superintendents expressed dissatisfaction with mentors who were not able to help new principals become instructional leaders. Some complained that they had mentors "from the 19th Century" who might have been wonderful building leaders, but didn't know current curriculum, learning theories, assessments, or the job of today's principals. In some cases, principals reported that they were nevertheless "glad for another set of eyes" and took what they could from these mentors. In others, however, the mentees were frustrated and did not pursue the relationship. Both superintendents and mentees suggested that the superintendents should be able to make a purposeful match and provide a mentor whose knowledge and skills complement the mentee principal's needs.

Providing a mentor from the same district as the mentee is not as clear a benefit as making an appropriate match of mentor and mentee. In fact, both mentors and mentees expressed opposing points of view concerning the benefit of working with principals from their own district or another district. Many mentors and mentees believe that one of the most important roles for the mentor is to help translate the district priorities and politics, to help navigate the district for the mentee. In addition, some of these mentors expressed frustration when they made suggestions to their mentees—for example, about a particular kind of professional development or building classroom libraries and implementing a balanced literacy program—that could

> Mentors should have, or be given, an understanding of context. They should have a clear sense of the district's priorities, learning philosophies, curricula and assessment, as well as information about the achievement data, demographics, and community of the mentee's school.

not be provided for within the context of another district. Thus, they believe it is essential that the mentor work in her own district where she knows intimately the district philosophy, resources, personnel, and politics.

By contrast, other mentors and mentees believe that working in a different district is preferable because the mentor does not experience any conflicts of loyalty between the mentee and the superintendent. One mentee, whose mentor worked in a different district, said that based on colleagues' experiences with mentors from the same district, his having a mentor from another district allowed them to enjoy a relationship free from politics and competition, more open and honest than it would have been had they been in the same district. A similar belief was expressed by mentors who preferred that their relationships with their mentees be completely non-supervisory and that they be free to give and get complete loyalty by not ever raising the possibility of communication with the mentee's superintendent. In this situation, there is also no possibility that mentor and mentee compete with each other, either for superintendent approval, students or teachers. Where mentors are from different districts, however, most noted that it would be helpful to have a clear understanding of any distinct district priorities, as well as information concerning the school and the leader's experience.

The Selection of Topics. The selection of topics on which each pair of principals work is dependent upon the ground rules of the mentor program, as well as upon the skills and personality of the individual mentor. In those programs that prohibit the superintendent from discussing the mentees or the mentoring relationships she has arranged for her principals with the mentors, the mentor and mentee have complete freedom to decide what they will work on. By contrast, in those programs where the mentor principals were employed by or consulting for the district directly, mentors could be given very specific assignments and be expected to inform the superintendent concerning the progress of the work. Where principals in one district were mentors for principals in another district, whether the mentors were given specific direction for the work varied tremendously.

Although many of the mentors interviewed were given specific assignments—and some of the superintendents were adamant that this was a necessary precondition for a successful mentoring relationship—in some cases, the selection of the mentors themselves meant that specific directives were not required. In a district where mentors could be given specific assignments, the deputy superintendent pointed out that because they selected such talented principals for mentors, many of them quickly came to see the same issues as the superintendent, deputy, or district office staff and, accordingly, there was "no need to be explicit about what to focus on." A similar belief was expressed by a mentee, who opined that a good mentor should not need to be told what to work on.

Despite the superintendents' and some mentors' desire that the mentors be given specific direction for the work, other mentors and most mentees expressed their preference that the pairs be permitted to make their own decisions and come to an agreement about the work they would do together. In fact, most mentees interviewed stated that they suggested topics and reached agreements with their mentors on the work they did together. And many mentors and mentees described the process of deciding what to work on as an important part of establishing a good working relationship with their mentees. "With the right connection," a mentee said, "the pieces fall into place. You invest in trust and you end up working on school improvement."

Preparation and Support for Principal Mentors. All of the mentors were asked whether, and how, they were prepared for and supported as mentors. With the exception of the university-based mentoring program, where the ground rules and expectations were communicated clearly and mentors met regularly in a study group with the program director before and during the program, there was very little preparation or support provided to mentors by the districts that employed them.

> Mentors and mentees should be given guidelines and clear expectations about the parameters of the program, including minimum time commitments, determination of areas of work, confidentiality, and accountability.

Most of the mentor programs forced mentors to "feel out" and develop their relationships with the mentees without guidance. Many of the mentors in these programs suggested that having clear expectations and guidelines for the mentoring relationship would be beneficial. They would like to know, for example, how often they are supposed to meet and/or speak with their partners; what, if anything, is supposed to be confidential and what is supposed to be conveyed to the district; and what particular needs the superintendent would like the mentors to address with their partners. Some, but not all, believed that they would eliminate any wasting of time if they were informed about their partners' particular strengths and areas of need. While others believed that might be true, they preferred to develop the relationship and the areas of work as a team with their mentees.

Once the programs were underway, support for most mentors was largely absent. While the districts described a few meetings each year, and in a few cases, monthly or bi-monthly meetings, most of these meetings provided an opportunity to share experiences and speak about the direction and progress of the mentee schools. Whatever the pur-

> Mentors need support. Mentor programs should provide opportunities for mentors to meet periodically as a group for professional development to study and enhance the mentoring experience.

pose of the meetings, almost every mentor expressed her desire for more support. Many suggested that the mentors should study together, focusing on adult learning and how to improve their effectiveness as mentors. Those that did not meet regularly as a group also suggested that such meetings would provide needed opportunities to raise common issues and concerns in their work, and would provide valuable insight into how to be a stronger mentor. In addition, some suggested that studying together—whatever the topic—would help them to become a more cohesive community while also ensuring that they continued to learn.

EVALUATING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Along with questions designed to elicit information about the mentoring experience, the interviews with mentors and mentor program directors sought information about how the mentor programs and mentoring relationships are evaluated, an important area largely untouched in the professional literature. While some superintendents had made explicit the need for mentors to set goals for their work, only a few specifically suggested looking to the achievement of those goals as a basis for evaluating the success of the mentor program. Rather, they all spoke more generally about informal but clear evaluation based on whether they saw evidence of changes in practice on the part of the mentee and improvements in student and/or teacher performance. Mentors also looked to changes in practice and achievement. In addition, mentors tended to assess their success based on the nature of their relationship with the mentees.

Most of the superintendents confirmed that they did not perform formal evaluations of their mentoring programs or the mentor relationships; however, their descriptions of how they informally evaluated the programs revealed that they most often looked at changes in the mentee's leadership style, school culture, and student achievement. When evaluating the success of their own mentoring relationships, mentors looked for similar changes. While mentors expressed the belief that they would be judged based on their ability to help facilitate the changes "assigned" by the superintendents, a few suggested that it would be helpful if specific criteria were given to them before they began the process.

One superintendent summed up how she evaluates the mentoring relationship by saying "you know it when you see it." When pressed to elaborate on what she looks for to evaluate the program, she named several elements common to those offered by other superintendents and by most mentors. They talked about their walk-throughs of the school and how these give them an opportunity to look at instruction, culture, and leadership style—all important areas they expect the mentors to have worked on with the school principals. Other evidence assessed by superintendents include written mentor

logs and notes—required by virtually every mentor program—and, in many instances, student performance data.

Mentors evaluated their relationships by looking at similar evidence. Some asked for feedback from the mentees as part of their own assessment. Others spoke about really using their final walk-through with the mentee as an opportunity to reflect on the success of the relationship. Still others said they look at test scores, and if the test scores have not risen, they believe they have not been successful mentors. Almost all of the mentors spoke about the importance of the relationship forged with the principal and looked to that relationship to evaluate the mentoring experience. "How do you know when a friend is a friend?" one mentor asked in response to questions about evaluating the relationship. According to these mentors, you learn about the success of the relationship by looking at how you're treated when you walk in the school, how hard the principal works to keep appointments with you, how many people in the school other than the principal know you, whether the relationship is one of mutual caring, etc. They get this feedback, and knowledge about the success of the work, one mentor said, "as in any human relationship." Because many of the mentors have already completed successful professional careers, they express the view that they only want to do this work as long as it is bringing about positive change. As one former principal summed it up, he is doing constant self-assessment and if he felt he was no longer having a significant impact, he would go elsewhere.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR A HIGH QUALITY PRINCIPAL MENTOR PROGRAM

The mentor relationships described and discussed in this paper provide the basis for sound recommendations about the design of successful mentor programs. Every mentor relationship is different, and dependent on the skills, personalities, needs, and availability of the two principals. Therefore, rather than describing the work that mentors and mentees should do together, the recommendations below are design principles. While it is not essential that all of the factors described below be part of a successful design—and the experiences of some of the mentors and mentees described herein attest to the fact that there can be very successful relationships in the absence, or even with the opposite of some of the recommendations—the totality of the research suggests the following:

1. Mentor principals, whether currently leading a school or former leaders of schools, must have a sound record of success. Except in specific instances where other skills are called for, mentors should be expert instructional leaders with solid knowledge about current learning theories, curriculum, assessment and school organization.

2. Matching principals with their mentors should be done purposefully and carefully. Mentors should be expert instructional leaders who have successful experience with

schools similar to the mentees, and mentors with particular strengths should be provided to mentees with parallel needs.

3. When selecting current principals as mentors, care must be taken to select only those whose schools are sufficiently strong that they will not suffer as a result of the principal being a mentor and spending time and energy working with another school leader.

4. Mentors and mentees should be given guidelines and clear expectations about the parameters of the program, including minimum time commitments (these should differ depending on whether the mentors are leading their own schools, but at a minimum include telephone calls once every two weeks and four school visits), determination of areas of work, confidentiality, and accountability.

5. Mentors should have, or be given, an understanding of context: They should have (a) a clear sense of the district's priorities, learning philosophies, curricula and assessment and (b) information about the achievement data, demographics, and community of the mentee's school.

6. Mentors need support. Mentor programs should provide opportunities for mentors to meet periodically as a group for professional development to study and enhance the mentoring experience.

7. Mentors who are currently leading their own schools should be willing to open up their schools and faculty members to the mentee. Mentors who are no longer leading their own schools should be given access to successful schools in order to arrange relevant school visits for mentees and their faculty members.

8. Mentors who are currently leading their own schools should mentor no more than two principals at a time. Mentors who are no longer leading their own schools should, depending on other commitments, mentor no more than six principals at one time.

9. Mentors should be compensated for the enormous amount of time and energy they are expected to spend with and on behalf of their mentees.

10. When selecting mentors, superintendents should seek to appoint leaders with a strong instructional knowledge base who are reflective, compassionate, good listeners, good communicators, and able to speak the hard truth.

CONCLUSION

There is no question that the job of school principal is difficult, multi-faceted, and extremely demanding. Principals, and in particular new principals, need a variety of supports to help them on their way to success. While there is a great deal of professional development that can be offered to groups—and much of this is critical to a principal being able to lead a school—there is also some support that can best be provided on a one-to-one basis. A trusted mentor who is supported by her district, possesses current

instructional expertise, as well as particular strengths needed by the mentee, has well-honed communication and interpersonal skills and is supportive of the mentee and her interests is ideally suited to provide this support. Whether a working principal or a former principal, a mentor who comes with expertise can be a role model, a source of critical knowledge and skills, a steadying presence, a confidante, an adviser and a lifeline. When the relationship between mentor and mentee is built on trust and is permitted to grow in a way in which both the mentor and mentee are comfortable, the mentee stands a much better chance of growing into the principalship successfully.

While there are questions to be grappled with—including the extent to which the mentor communicates with the superintendent, the relative merits of the principal and mentor being from the same or different districts, and whether the superintendent or the principals select the topics of work—as long as the mentor has expertise, is available, and is trusted and welcomed by the mentee, there can only be benefit from the relationship. Mentoring for principals is, of course, not a panacea. But in this age when we demand so much of our school principals, and their strengths and skills are so critical to the success of our schools, providing each with a mentor as these six districts have done holds great promise for their future and for our children.

NOTES

1. *Crisis in Leadership.* New Visions for Public Schools, 2000. See also *New York Times,* 17 January 2001.

2. Examples of well-known mentor relationships in all these disciplines are listed in Merriam, S., "Mentors and Proteges: A Critical Review of the Literature." *Adult Education Quarterly* 33 (Spring 1983): 162.

3. See Darling-Hammond, L., "Teacher Learning that Supports Student Learning." *Educational Leadership* Vol. 55 (5) (1998); Rowley, J., "The Good Mentor." *Educational Leadership* Vol. 56 (8) (1998), Sullivan, C.G., "How to Mentor in the Midst of Change." <www.ascs.org/readingroom/books/sullivan92book.html> 1992.

4. Because a few of the principals being mentored had worked with two or more mentors and several of the mentors were paired with more than one mentee, the experiences described in the interviews reflect more than the 23 mentoring relationships that would otherwise be suggested by the number of interviews.

5. Fink, E., and Resnick, L.B., *Developing Principals as Instructional Leaders. Learning Research and Development Center,* University of Pittsburgh, 2000.

6. Description and citations in Goddard, J.T., "Croaks from the Lily Pad: Toward the Provision of a Peer Mentoring Program for Principals," in *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning* (March 7, 1998) and in *Mentors and the Mentoring Process: A Handbook.* University of Houston, Sid W. Richardson Urban Principals' Project (Draft 2000).

7. For example, James B. Rowley lists the following qualities of a good teacher mentor, all of which are helpful for thinking about what makes a good principal mentor: The good mentor is committed to the role of mentoring; accepting of the beginning teacher; skilled at providing instructional support; effective in different interpersonal contexts; a model of a continuous learner; and communicates hope and optimism. Rowley, J.B., "The Good Mentor." *Educational Leadership* Vol. 56, No. 8 (May 1999). Many of those same qualities are described by the mentors and mentees interviewed for this study.

8 See, for example, Hughes, L.W. *The Principal as Leader.* New York: Macmillan, 1994 (cited in Goddard, J.T., "Croaks from the Lily Pad: Toward the Provision of a Peer Mentoring Program for Principals." *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning* (March 7, 1998) ("even the most well-conceived mentor program will thrive only within a broader context of mutual trust, support and collegiality").

9. Under New York State law, where data from test scores or drop-out rates are sufficiently poor, or other specified school data meet criteria to define a "poor learning environment," schools are designated as Schools Under Registration Review, or "SURR." New York State Education Department, Commissioner's Regulations, Section 100.2

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96 Morton St. ∘ New York, NY 10014
212-645-5110 ∘ Fax: 212-645-7409
www.newvisions.org